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The Afghan Muslims of Guyana and Suriname

RAYMOND CHICKRIE

Introduction

Guyana and Suriname are located on the northeast coast of South America and are two of the three non-Hispanic enclaves that make up the Guianas. Suriname is also one of the most ethnically and culturally mixed countries in the world. In Paramaribo, the capital of this Dutch speaking nation of about 450,000 people, architecture graphically reflects this synthesis of peoples. A beautiful Mughal style mosque shares the same street with an imposing nineteenth-century wooden synagogue; several Hindu temples and the Roman Catholic cathedral can be found in the capital as well. Suriname and Guyana are colourful mixtures of African and Asian influences.

Guyana and Suriname's rich cultural mosaic is the legacy of the Dutch and British plantation economy, which after the abolition of slavery brought many indentured workers from British India, Indonesia, and China (see Figure 1). They joined the descendants of African slaves, a large Jewish community, a European and Middle Eastern business and professional élite and the remnants of the indigenous Arawak and Carib peoples. Dutch, Hindustani, Hakka, Mandarin, and Javanese are also spoken in Suriname. Islam, Hinduism and Christianity are part of the cultural mosaic. In Guyana English is the medium of exchange. Hindi and Urdu are used only for religious purposes by Hindus and Muslims (see Figure 2). In both countries the majority of the Asian immigrants settled in the fertile farming area near the coast, while the African-descended Creoles tended to move into the cities. Some Surinamese who were former slaves from West Africa escaped the Dutch sugar plantations into the jungle. These runaway slaves are called *boschnegers*.

The Political Scene

Both Suriname and Guyana experienced political turmoil after independence from Holland and England. Guyana had an Afro-dominated dictatorship, which marginalized East Indians, while in Suriname several coups rocked the country's peaceful history. Remarkably, this cosmopolitan mixture held together under Dutch rule, but as independence approached, ethnically based political parties took shape, rallying supporters on racial lines. In Guyana racial tensions have spilled over into ethnic violence several times, but in Suriname consociational democracy has worked. The Dutch pulled out in 1975, promising continued aid, but many Surinamese who were fearful of what happened in neighbouring Guyana to East Indians decided to accept the offer of Dutch citizenship. Some 40,000 migrated to Holland in the months preceding independence. Today over 400,000 Surinamese live in Holland. In Guyana over half of its population migrated to the United States, Canada, England, Suriname and Trinidad. The dictatorship in Guyana ended in 1992 after the United States decided to support the democratic movement. With the end of the Cold War, the United States was no

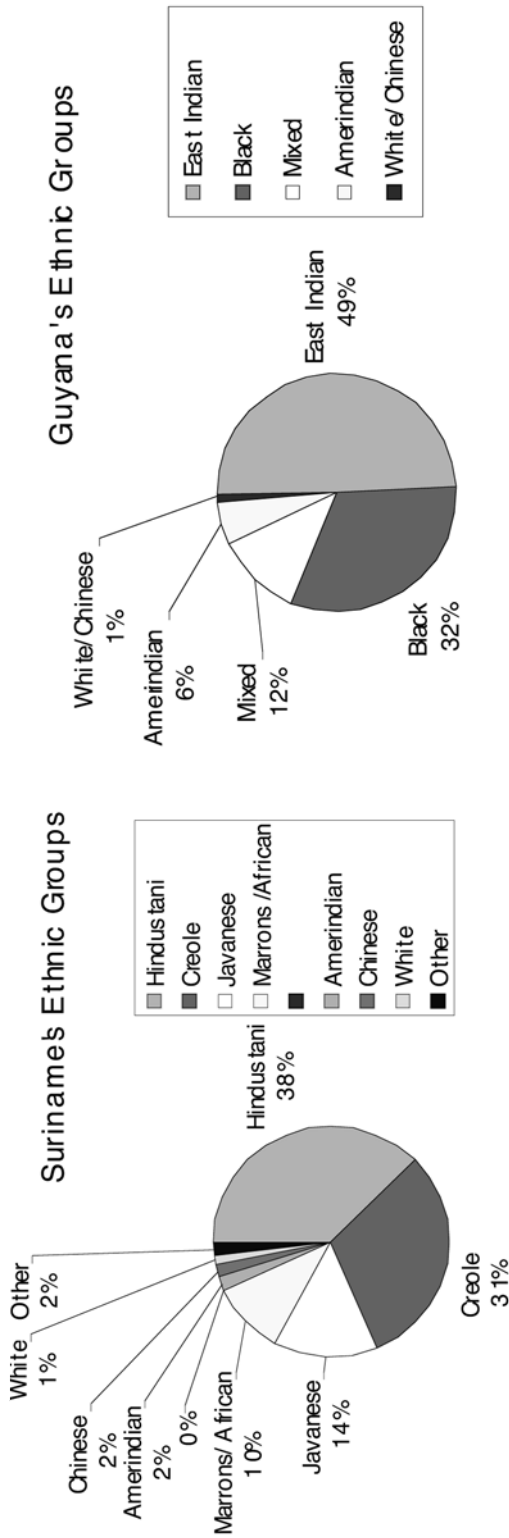


FIG. 1. Ethnic distribution.

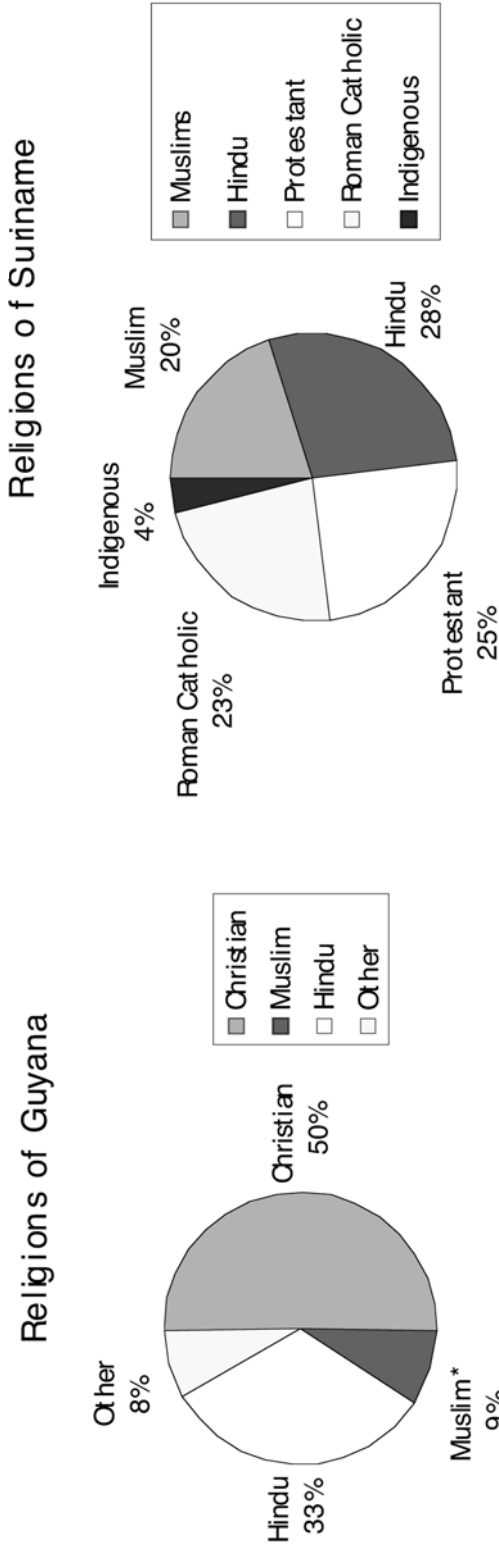


FIG. 2. Religious distribution.

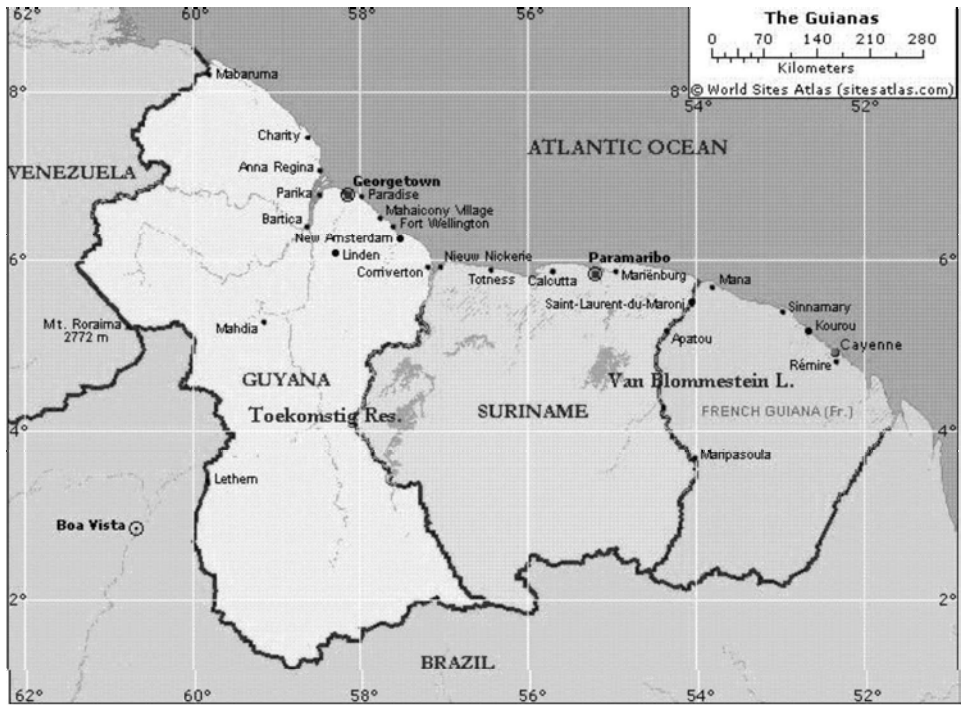


FIG. 3. Map of the Guianas.

longer afraid of the opposition People's Progressive Party as the leadership of the PPP was accused of being communist sympathizers.

Their fears were in part justified, for Guyana and Suriname underwent a series of political and economic traumas in the 1980s. A coup in 1980 brought Colonel Desi Bouterse to power, and when 15 opposition leaders were executed in 1982, the Netherlands imposed sanctions. Then, from 1986, a guerrilla war broke out between *boschnegers* and the Paramaribo-based military regime. Civilian rule was only solidly re-established in 1991, and since then the country's fractious ethnic parties have formed more or less unstable coalition governments. The former dictator, Bouterse, who has remained an influential presence, was indicted for cocaine smuggling by a Dutch court in 1997; the Surinamese government refused to extradite him but in 1999 he was sentenced *in absentia* to 16 years of imprisonment.

Guyana and Suriname remain dependent on a handful of commodities: bauxite, sugar, timber, rice and bananas. Suriname continues to rely on Dutch financial support, which is decreasing and ever more conditional on democratic reforms. About half the population is estimated to live in poverty, and remittance payments from relatives in the Netherlands keep many families alive. This material poverty, deepening over the last decade, contrasts ironically with the country's extraordinary wealth of cultural diversity. Guyana, on the other hand, has been experiencing positive economic growth since the liberalization of the economy in the 1990s. Violence continues to plague Guyana in which people of South Asian decent are mostly the victims. The police have also become victims of armed gangs. Suriname, however, has remained relatively safe and stable.

Muslims in Guyana and Suriname

In Suriname, there are a large number of Muslims, and they constitute 20% of the total population of 425,000 of the country. Three distinct Muslim communities live in Suriname. The Javanese from the Indonesian Archipelago have been living in the country for more than 50 years. Indo-Pakistanis came as indentured labour over 100 years ago. Besides, there is a growing Afro-Surinamese community here.¹ In Guyana the Muslim community is close to 12%, and is made up primarily of South Asians and a growing Afro minority. In both countries the South Asians are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi School (*mazhab*) of *fiqh*.

The Africans were the first Muslims in this region. Today with the diligent efforts of scholars and researchers, the role of Muslims as an indigenous people in this part of the world is receiving serious attention. Thanks to the efforts of scholars such as Shaykh Abdullah Hakim Quick of Toronto, Dr Sulayman Nyang of Howard University, Adib Rashad of Washington, DC, and Abdullah Bilal Omowale of Trinidad, the history of the African Muslims of the Western hemisphere is now coming to light.² One source points out that:

Until recent years, the presence of Muslims in the Western Hemisphere during the pre-Columbian and antebellum periods was known only to the most disciplined of researchers and historians. Intellectual dishonesty and lethargy and Euro-centric conceptions of history were the primary culprits behind this conspiracy of silence that virtually erased Islam from the pages of Western formative history.

The impact of Islam on the lands of the Caribbean may have begun with West African Mandinka seafarers and adventurers landing on the tropical isles well over a century before Columbus ‘accidentally discovered’ the New World islands. The Islamic practices of the ‘black’ Carib Indians and the appearance of Indian women with face veils chronicled in the diaries of Columbus scream loudly that the Moors (read Muslims), so dreaded by the Spanish, had left an indelible mark before the Christianization of the West.³

The transatlantic slave trade brought millions of Muslims into the Caribbean, and some came to Suriname. ‘The “Bush Negroes” in Surinam, led by Arabi and Zam-Zam, defeated the Dutch on many occasions and were finally given a treaty and their own territory (near French Guyana) which they control until today.’⁴ Apart from Muslims of South Asian descent, Muslims from Java brought by the Dutch settled in Suriname. Suriname is isolated from the Caribbean because of its geography and colonial legacy. The Javanese are an integral part of Surinamese society. There is also a handful of immigrants from the Middle East settled mainly from Syria, Lebanon and Palestine in Suriname. All ethnic groups in Suriname have maintained their space.

Islam was reintroduced to Suriname in 1873 when the ship Lalla Rookh arrived with 37 Hindustani Muslims. The 37 were from Bareilly, Gorakhpur, Mirzapur, Lucknow, Allahbad, Jansi, Jaunpur, Azamgargh, Gaya, Faizabad, Sewree, and Benares (Varanasi) in India. From 1873 to 1916 Muslims from the Indian provinces of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, the Northwest Frontier and Bihar continued arriving in Suriname. These mainly Urdu speaking Muslims were from the Sunni Hanafi *mazhab*, and they celebrated the *Eids* as well as *Muhurram* and *Milad-un-Nabi*. The strong influence of the *Shia*’ and the Sufis of North India could be felt in Suriname. Urdu is the functional language of the Hindustani Muslims of Suriname to this day and the community has

resisted 'arabization'. The Ahmadhiyya movement has penetrated Suriname's Muslim community. They have built some of the finest mosques reflecting Mughal architecture. On the other hand, the Sunnis have built one of the largest mosques in the region using a combination of arabesque and Mughal architecture. They also support one of the finest Islamic learning centres in the region for children and future *imams*.

The Javanese Muslims from Indonesia began arriving in Suriname in the 1890s. The Surinam–Javanese community are *kejawen*, following the syncretic practices and beliefs of Java.⁵ In this community the *keblat* (*qibla*) expresses a unique diasporic experience and identity. From the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) villagers were recruited from Java as contract workers for the plantations in another Dutch colonial land, Surinam. Most of them were *kejawen* Muslims. *Kejawen* Islam, which was dominant in Javanese villages, is a syncretic Islam that incorporated old Javanese beliefs, including Hindu–Buddhist elements.⁶

The Afghan Muslims

Little is known about the Afghan Muslims of Guyana and Suriname. In fact, some may be amazed to learn that Afghans made their way to Guyana and Suriname among the Indian Muslims from 1838 to 1916. When Indian indentured labourers began arriving in Guyana and Suriname in 1838, India was already conquered and assimilated by Persians, Central Asian Turks, Arabs, Afghans, Greeks, Hazaris and Baluchis, among other Muslim clans who settled in India's large cities. The dominant minority, the Muslims, settled in large cities such as Ahmadabad, Allahabad, Delhi, Karachi, Lahore, Bihar, Ghazipur, Lucknow, and Hyderabad. These exotic people found great economic opportunities in India and they were encouraged to migrate to the Metropolis by the Mughal Emperors. In India in 1857 many Afghan Pathans rose up against the British and many were executed, jailed or sent overseas. Many of these 'trouble makers' were sent to Guyana and Suriname.

There was always a strong Afghan presence in Bareilly, Muradabad and Badayun in India. These districts had strong Afghan townships, where over 9000 Afghans settled. It was with the immigration of Daud Khan, an Afghan slave (who originally hails from Roh in Afghanistan), to the region that the Afghan Rohillas had come into prominence. His adopted son Ali Muhammad Khan succeeded in carving out an estate for himself in the district with his headquarter at Aonla. He was ultimately made the lawful governor of Kateher by the Mughal emperor, and the region was henceforth called 'the land of the Ruhelas'. Eventually after the end of the Mughal Empire many Pathans migrated from Rohilkhand. Bareilly as a ruined city became crowded with unemployed, restless Rohilla Pathans. Many urban cities in Uttar Pradesh were experiencing economic stagnation and poverty. Naturally, this led to heavy migration overseas.

The slightest weakening of the central authority provoked acts of defiance from the Katehriya Rajputs. Thus the Mughals initiated the policy of allotting lands for Afghan settlements in Katihir.⁷ Afghan settlements continued to be encouraged throughout the reign of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (1658–1707) and even after his death. These Afghans, known as the Rohilla Afghans, caused the area to be known as Rohilkhand.⁸ The Mughal policy of encouraging Afghan settlements for keeping the Katehriyas in check worked only as long as the central government was strong. After Aurangzeb's death, the Afghans, having themselves become local potentates, began to seize and occupy neighbouring villages.

Immigration records indicate that the majority of Muslims who migrated to Guyana

and Suriname came from the urban centres of Uttar Pradesh: Agra, Ahlhabad, Bahraich, Fyzabad, Gonda, Gorakhpur, Ghazipur, Mirzapur, Lucknow, Muradabad, Bareilly, Rampur, and Sultanpur. Small batches also came from Karachi in Sindh; Lahore, Multan and Rawalpindi in the Punjab; Hyderabad in the Deccan; Srinagar in Kashmir; and Peshawar and Mardan in the Northwest Frontier (Afghan areas). Immigration certificates reveal major details of Muslim migrants. Their place of origin such as district and village was recorded. Their physical features such as colour and height were recorded as well. Their Immigration Certificate indicated their caste/religion as well. Under caste Muslims are identified as Musulman, Mosulman, Musalman, Sheik Musulman, Mahomedaan, Syed, Sheik, Jolaba, Mughal, Pathan, Pattian, and Musulman (Pathan). Religion and caste identified many Muslims. From looking at their district of origin one can tell of their ethnicity, whether they were Sindhis, Biharis, Gujarati, Punjabi, Pathans or Kashmiri. Their physical profile on the Immigration Certificate also helps in recognizing their ethnicity. There are enormous spelling mistakes on the Immigration Certificates. Musulman, the Urdu word for Muslim, is spelled in many different ways and sometimes Muslims were referred to as Mahomedaan. Peshawar is spelled Peshaur and Nowsherra is Nachera, among many others.

The Afghan Pathan clan was among the Muslim migrants. Immigration Certificates clearly indicate this under the category of 'caste' Pathans, 'Musulman Pathan' Pattan or Pattian. The fact that there were Pathan settlements in northern India explains this migration. Immigration Certificates further substantiate this. Pathans migrated from Peshawar, Nowsherra, and Mardan in the Northwest Frontier as well as from Kashmir. Some Pathans also came from Dholpur, Rajasthan. From Uttar Pradesh they migrated from Agra, Bareilly, Lucknow, Rohtak, Janhora, Jaunpur, Gonda, Shahjahanpur, Barabanki, and Delhi, among other cities in this province. The Pathans also migrated from Multan, Rawalpindi and Lahore in the Punjab. Again the spelling of districts, towns and villages varies. With considerable knowledge, the writer was able to recognize these places. A few name places remain an enigma and are unrecognizable in reading the Immigration Certificates.

History and Culture of the Afghans

Pathans were always respected by the Mughals and were heavily patronized by Mughal Emperors in order to pacify them. The Afghans also acted as the buffer zone in the Northwest Frontier; they kept invaders out of Mughal India. And in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries they kept the Russians at bay. Without the support of the Pathans the Mughal Empire would not have lasted for as long as it did.

The Pathan, or Puktun, are a race of warriors who live primarily in Afghanistan and Pakistan. They consist of about 60 tribes, each with its own territory. Although their origin is unclear, their legends say that they are the descendants of Afghana, grandson of King Saul. However, most scholars believe that they probably arose from ancient Aryans intermingling with subsequent invaders.

The people of Afghanistan form a mosaic of ethnic and linguistic groups. Pashto (Pashtu) and Dari, a dialect of Persian (Farsi), are Indo-European languages; they are the official languages of the country. More than half of the population speaks Pashto, the language of the Pashtuns, while about half of the population speaks Dari, the language of the Tajiks, Hazaras, Chahar Aimaks, and Kizilbash peoples. The other Indo-European languages, spoken by smaller groups, include Western Dardic (Nuris-

tani or Kafiri), Baluchi, and a number of Indic and Pamiri languages spoken principally in isolated valleys in the northeast. Turkic languages, a subfamily of the Altaic languages, are spoken by the Uzbek and Turkmen peoples, the most recent settlers, who are related to peoples from the steppes of Central Asia. The Turkic languages are closely related; within Afghanistan they include Uzbek, Turkmen, and Kyrgyz, the last spoken by a small group in the extreme northeast.

The Afghans who came to Guyana and Suriname were mostly Pathans and a few were Hazaris. The Pathans come from Afghanistan and the wild west of Pakistan: the Northwest Frontier Province that borders Afghanistan. In his text, *Warrior Race*, Imran Khan writes, 'physically the Pathan has more in common with the people of Central Asia than with those of the subcontinent. The fine, aquiline features, high cheek-bones and light skin reflect the Pathan's origins in Afghanistan and Turkey'.⁹

Pathans from various areas such as the Mahsuds from South Waziristan and the Waziri tribe from North Waziristan, differ in complexion, hair and eye colour. Some are taller and fairer while some have green and blue eyes. 'Many of the tribal elders dye their grey beards red with henna',¹⁰ a practice that some elder Afghans kept in Guyana. Pathans are very competitive and determined; they show no fear. They are honest, dignified, and uncompromising in their promises. Money does not impress a Pathan. 'It is the Pathan's sense of honour that makes him conduct himself with such dignity, and a fiercely independent spirit that makes even the poorest tribesman walk like a king.'¹¹

To understand the Afghans, one has to look carefully at their culture in context of their geographical landscape. Why are they so rebellious and difficult to conquer? Originating from Afghanistan, the Pathans are one of the greatest warrior races on earth; they have never been conquered. For centuries the Pathans have 'existed by raiding, robbing and kidnapping'.¹² But one has to understand the physical terrain of the Pathans. 'In the mountainous terrain, hardly anything grows, and whatever is produced is insufficient to sustain the population of the area.'¹³ Sometimes it is difficult to sustain the family without raiding and kidnapping from the affluent lowlands to feed the family. 'It is not the nature of such a proud race of people to resort to begging.'¹⁴ Consequently, robbing and kidnapping became a means of survival.

The Pathans are the majority in Afghanistan. The British in 1893 created the Durand Line separating Afghanistan from India and 'slicing right through the Pathan's territory'.¹⁵ The southern part of Afghanistan is predominantly Pathan. Due to tribal rivalries many Pathan tribes settled along the banks of the Indus, the Waziristan, and the Vale of Swat, Peshawar and between the Sutlej and Beas rivers. 'There were Pathan settlements in Northern India in Hoshiarpur, Pathankot, near Lucknow, Rohailkand and many other areas.'¹⁶ This explains the presence of Afghans among the Indians who went to Guyana as well. Some Pathan tribes are the Yusufzai, Afridi, Niazis, Lodhis, Ghoris, Burkis, Waziri, Mahsud, Marwats and Khatkaks.

A Common Ancestry

Pathans believe that they are all descended from a common ancestor, Qais. He is said to have met the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet gave Qais the name, Pthun, and Qais was to take Islam back to his home. One of Qais's sons was named Afghana, who had four sons. Every Pathan traces its descent from one of these four sons.

The first of these four Pathan branches is the Sarbani; this includes the largest Pathan tribe, the Yusufzai, which settled in Swat, as well as the Tarkalani, Mohmands and Muhammadzai. The second grouping is the Bitani. The Niazis, Ghilzais, Lodhis, Suris,

Marwats, Lohanis, and Nuhranis belong to this group. The third branch is the Karlani, which includes some of the wildest tribes, such as the Mahsud, Waziri, Afridi, Orakzai, Dawar and Bangash. The fourth branch is still being researched by the author though some say there are only three branches in all.

The Code of Honour

Pathan is a corrupted version for Pukhtun. This word means 'backbone, hospitality, bravery and honour'. The culture of the Pathan is based on the latter principles. 'Which is enshrined in a code of honour known as Puktunwali, or the way of the Pathans.'¹⁷ According to Imran Khan, a Pathan is recognized by other Pathans not so much by facial characteristics as by his adherence to 'Pukhtunwali'. If he does not follow the code, he is not a Pathan. The wilder tribes adhere to the code more strictly.

Pushtunwali is followed religiously, and it includes the following practices: *melmastia* (hospitality and protection to every guest); *nanawati* (the right of a fugitive to seek refuge, and acceptance of his *bona fide* offer of peace); *badal* (the right of blood feuds or revenge); *tureh* (bravery); *sabat* (steadfastness); *imamdari* (righteousness); *'isteqamat* (persistence); *ghayrat* (defence of property and honour); and *mamus* (defence of one's women).

Pukhtunwali is closely linked to the spirit of Islamic justice and rejection of unfairness. It is not a coincidence that Pathans rose up against British injustice on the sugar plantations of Guyana. Khan writes, 'The criterion by which a man is judged is not the amount of money he has but how honourable he and his family are'.¹⁸ A Pathan will go at length to maintain his honour. 'Any slight to his honour has to be avenged—there is no question of turning the other cheek.'¹⁹ Revenge is taken only on male members of a family.

Religious Zeal

The majority of Pathans are Sunni Muslims. Islam came to them as a great liberating and unifying force. For this reason, their underlying faith and steadfast devotion to Islam remain very strong. Pathans are staunch believers and would go at length to defend Islam. They practise Islam according to the Qur'an without deviation. It is no wonder that we see the Afghan play a prominent role in the history of Guyana and Suriname. The building of the Queenstown Masjid was initiated by the Afghans in Guyana, while a leading Afghan immigrant, Munshi Rehman Khan, nurtured his community.

Afghans and the Queenstown Masjid

An Afghan with a typical Afghan name, Gool (Gul) Mohammad Khan, who was an indentured labourer, took the initiative to build the Queenstown Jama Masjid. The first *imaam* of the Masjid was reported to have been Gool Mohammad Khan. Gool Mohammad Khan, after serving his indenturedship, returned to India. It is also reported that another Muslim bearing the name Jilani was the first *imaam*. 'The Jamaat comprised Muslims from India and Afghanistan; the latter apparently arrived in this country via India.'²⁰

Gool Mohammad Khan persuaded another Afghan, Goolam-uddin, to purchase the plot of land for the building of the Masjid. Mr Goolam-uddin lived on the property of

the Masjid and was the caretaker of the property. This Afghan was reputed to have a 'dominant personality and kept a full beard coloured reddish brown with henna'.²¹ Like most Afghans, Goolam-uddin also had a stern and 'forceful nature'. Thus, disputes rose among the Afghan and Indian Muslims and 'eventually around 1923–1924 the Indian members decided to leave the Masjid ...'²² However, the Afghan control of the Masjid lasted for only a few years because of their small number and reemigration to India.

Afghan Resistance

The Story of Mazar Khan

Mazar Khan arrived in British Guiana in 1883 to work as an indentured labourer. He was sent to Plantation Caledonian on the Essequibo Coast. His descendants were nostalgic for the past and in 1998 journeyed to Northern India to retrace his roots. This expedition took them to the village of Somdutt in Meerut. This information was of course taken from his Immigration Certificate. After consultation at a mosque in Somdutt, they were taken to meet the oldest person in the village. With translation and the help of a few members of the mosque the 'old man' was reached. With great amazement they learnt that this old man, Hurma Khan, who in 1998 was 110 years old, is the son of Chand Khan, who was the brother of Sujati Hassan Khan, father of Mazar Khan. In other words, Hurma Khan is the first cousin of Mazar Khan.²³

It was then learnt that Mazar Khan was a 'freedom fighter' during the 1880s mutiny against the British. Meerut holds a special place in Indian history as the place where the mutiny started. In an attempt to retaliate, the British rounded up the 'trouble makers' and sent them to '*kalla-paanie*', or black waters.²⁴ The Khans have been known in history for their tenacity to resist tyranny and to fight for *izzat, jaan aur maal* (honour, life and property) and wherever they went they upheld these values not only for themselves but also for all others. While in the Guyanas, they advocated for Indians, Hindus, Pathans or Muslims. Mazar Khan's resistance had led to his exile from India.

Making History: Munshi Rehman M. Khan

At age 24, Rehman M. Khan (1874–1972), a young Pathan, arrived in Suriname in 1898 on the steamship Avon. In his autobiography he discusses his Pathan roots. He came from Hammirpur, a district in Uttar Pradesh, under strange circumstances. He was an educated Pathan Muslim and found employment as a *munshi* (teacher) in a government middle school at Maudha, a *tehsil* headquarters (revenue sub-division) of the Hamirpur district. 'But after six months of teachership he somehow or other got fed-up and gave it up.'²⁵ After a long contemplation of three months at the depot in Calcutta he sailed for Suriname arriving there on 13 April 1898. In Suriname he was assigned to Plantation Alliance and became known as Munshi Rehman M. Khan.

This young Khan knew the Qur'an as well as the Ramayana very well. He soon became popular in his plantation and among the surrounding Indians of the other plantations as a Ramayan specialist. He started propagating the Ramayana ideology and taught Hindi to the children of the Indian community. He was also attached as an interpreter and *sardar* (head of the labour force) in a plantation. He wrote many books but only two of his small books were published in India in the 1950s. According to the

interpreter of some of his literary works, Mohan K. Gautham, there are many manuscripts available which he wrote in Suriname dealing with the Muslim problems in Suriname, the language issues and his own biography in four volumes. Coming from a middle class Pathan family, Khan was very educated. His knowledge of Urdu and Hindi helped his literary prose. He was also a poet and could compose poetry in standard Hindi 'with a flavour of Braj'.²⁶

Rehman Khan trained Muslims and Hindu priests as well as interpreters. At the end of his five-year contract, he left Plantation Alliance and moved to Dijkveld near the city of Paramaribo along the Suriname River. He used his knowledge to educate the Hindu and Muslim community and to reconstruct the 'Indian identity'. Khan kept in touch with India constantly and was always craving for news from his homeland. He continued his correspondence with family and friends in India and remitted money to his parents. He was always eager to know the latest situation in India and for this purpose he not only kept correspondence with friends, but also with many publishing concerns, such as the Venkateshwar Press in Bombay. From his autobiography we see how attached he was to Suriname since he decided to remain in the colony after he was a free man. He bought a piece of land and sold vegetables and dairy products. Khan got married and had children. He was rewarded for all his efforts and finally the Queen of the Netherlands honoured him with the highest order for his literary and social activities.²⁷

From his autobiography, one gets the story of his life and how he went to Suriname. He narrates how he was recruited for Suriname. Khan went to the parade grounds of Kanpur and was met by two men who were finely dressed. 'Thinking them to be sympathetic gentlemen, I greeted them. Because they were wearing clean and fine dresses, they were looking nice.'²⁸ After discovering that Khan was educated, they offered him a job with a great salary that he could not resist. He was offered a job as a 'saradara' (headman) with a salary of '12 annas'. A job as a supervisor making a lot of money was an offer that he could not resist.²⁹

Khan was informed about the nature of his job, which was to supervise labourers on a sugar plantation. 'There you will have to supervise the labourers and you will have to travel on the government's boat on the expenses of the government.'³⁰ He was told that the plantation was in Sriram Tapu (Suriname) and that the ship from Calcutta takes three months to reach there. Quickly, the men convinced him to get registered in the government office. The fact that this was going to be a government job and that he was going to register with the government further convinced Khan. He was brought to the Calcutta Depot where he saw the labourers he would supervise. The young Pathan was also promised other perks like free food and expenses. 'You will not have any sort of problem. Enjoy your drink and food happily, live comfortably and carry on the government work honestly, this is the only way of getting your own promotion.'³¹ Khan was now convinced. 'Hearing such tempting words I became very happy. I just forgot my own self, got separated from my own family and fell into the trap of my luck.'³² He lived in the depot and thought of changing his mind several times, and at one point he felt like a 'trapped bird'. Little did he know that he could have said 'no' to the Magistrate. But that was not meant to be '[b]ecause the Great Allah had removed my subsistence from India and transported it into Suriname. And He had banished me forever from Hindustan. It was sad and very sad'.³³

Khan kept close contact with friends and family in India. He was the only son of his parents and they nagged him constantly to return to India. A letter he received from his family on 1 January 1908 begged him to return to India. His parents were very ill and

his mother had become very old and blind. They wrote to him, 'The money, which you want to send to us, it is the opinion of all people here that with the same money please come for one time (to India) and meet us. Everyone wants to see you'.³⁴ But Suriname was now home and he had to nurture the Indian community there. He was a very pious Muslim like the Pathans and at the same time reached out to the entire community. He was a Muslim at home but also a staunch Indian, proud of his Indian background and the Indian community. According to Gautam, Hindus and Muslims to him were linked by one motherland, Hindustan. Gautam quotes Khan: '*Dui jati bharata se aye, Hindu Musalmana Kahalaye, Rahi priti donom maim bhari, jaise dui bandhu eka mehatari*' ('Two communities came from India, They were called as Hindus and Muslims; Between them existed an intense love. As they were two brothers from the same mother').³⁵

The Rose Hall Uprising

The Rose Hall sugar worker strike of 1913 saw Afghans and Muslims resistant to indenturedship. This is nothing new; the Pathans had resisted the British in India and some were sent to Guyana and Suriname, where they continued this resistance. Some Muslims who challenged the British bore the last name Khan, a typical Pathan (Afghan) name. Moula Bux, Jahangir Khan and Dildar Khan fit the profile of the Pathan. Three other Muslims were also involved; Chotey Khan, Aladi, and Amirbaksh. According to Mangru in his text, *Indenture and Abolition*, 'Moula Bux was nicknamed "munshiji" (scribe or writer) and was formerly an office worker in a jute factory in India'.³⁶ Dildar Khan according to Mangru was recruited in Kanpur, India.

It would seem from the tenacity of these Khans who were involved in the Rose Hall uprising that they fit the profile of the firebrand Pathans. Pathans never let tyranny to go unpunished. It is part of their 'code of honour' to root out injustice and defend the weak from exploitation. And this is exactly what the Pathans did in Guyana.

Food and Clothing

The Pathans are meat lovers. Many were meat handlers in Guyana and some owned businesses in Georgetown. There was always a mince mill in the home of the Pathans to grind meat to make kebabs. They substituted the tandoor oven for the local fireside in Guyana to cook their kebabs. The famous *firmi* (rice pudding) for dessert was served on all auspicious occasions. Some Muslims call it *sirmi* and cook it differently from the Pathans. The diet of the Pathan Afghan Guyanese was quite different from that of the Indian Muslims but eventually the authentic cuisine of the Afghans died as the few remaining Afghans interbred with non-Afghan Muslims. Never can I forget Begum Bibi Hannifa Khan Hussein from my town. She had strong Afghan roots. Her family's physical features, culture and diet stood out amongst their Muslim brethren in the community. She always had an entourage of people cooking at her home. Lavish meat dishes and Afghan bread were prepared. Meat was always ground for kofta kebab. During her lifetime she hardly set foot on the grounds of the plantation that her husband Ishaq Hussein managed for Amin and Ahmad Sankar. From a distance, while maintaining the tradition of *pardah*, she gave orders to the men with her resounding voice.

The clothing of the Afghan Guyanese Muslims was quite different from that of the Muslim Indian. While the Muslim Indian men wore the Indian Shirt and Pajama, the Afghan wore the baggy *shalwar* (pants) and *kameez* (shirt). The Afghan prefers loose

baggy wear; both males and females wore baggy modest clothing. Indian Muslims wore brighter colour clothing, while Afghan Muslims wore subtle colours. Pathans also wore the *pagri* or the head wrap.

Due to the fact that scholars have not explored deeply the history of Muslims in Suriname and Guyana, not much is known about this subject and much less about the Afghans Muslims. While we know that Afghan Pathans speak Pashto, there is no evidence of Pashto or Persian written literature in neither Guyana nor Suriname. But there can be no doubt that Pashto was spoken by some of these Pathans, especially those who migrated directly from the NWFP. And who knows, such literature may still exist today among local Afghan families.

Not All Khans Are Pathans

Today a well-known Indian Muslim community is of Pathan heritage. The Pathans arrived in India from Afghanistan. They normally have their surname as Khan. Regardless of how far the Pathans travel, 'Puktunwali' is kept. The Pathans in India still have an image of being brave, honest and righteous. Many Indians who adopted Islam adopted the surname Khan and they claim that they are Pathans, which is not always true, but a considerable amount of them live in northern India. Guyanese are very familiar with some Indian celebrities of Pathan nomenclature: Feroz Khan, Shahrukh Khan, Amjad Khan, Saif Ali Khan, Aamir Khan, and Salman Khan, among many others, and not all of them are Pathans.

Like some of the Khans of India, not all the Khans of Guyana are Pathans. Many later converts to Islam adopted this noble title as their surname. The true Khans of the Pathan race are obvious because of their physical traits and phenotype. In trying to research this subject, a number of Guyanese Muslims have discussed with the author their Pathan heritage. Their recollections are vague but not farfetched. However, there are Pathans not bearing the last name Khan who made it to the shores of Guyana and Suriname as well. One family traced their great grandfather to the Pakistan/Afghan border. In fact, this family still had artefacts and clothing belonging to their great grandfather, and by using his Pathan *shakwar kameez*, they were able to trace the village from where he migrated. Many others with Pathan features spoke of their Pathan heritage but had limited facts to enrich their history. This has frustrated many of them who yearn to hold on to this heritage.

Conclusion

The Pathans have played an important role in the history of their region and in the countries of their adoption. From their community came Muslim rulers, administrators, and soldiers. While many of them have moved out of the highlands in search of an easier life in the plains and across oceans, their mountainous homeland continues to be their citadel of strength and freedom. Many races came to Hindustan and settled. The Afghan Pathan clan quickly became Indian and assimilated. With the coming of the British to India and the need for labourers in British and Dutch Colonies, many Pathans opted for better lives or to seek fast cash in the former colonies of British and Dutch Guiana in South America. These Pathans have introduced their indomitable spirit into these lands. The story of Mazar Khan, Rehman Mohammad Khan and the leaders of the Rose Hall uprising in Guyana are just a few examples of Pathan bravery and commitment to justice, honesty and integrity of the community that they live in.

The building of the Queenstown Jama Masjid in Guyana and Munshi Rehman M. Khan's role in the preservation of Islam among his native Hindustanis again illustrates the religious zeal of the Pathans. From Afghanistan they came to India, and from India they graced the landscape of Guyana and Suriname with 'Pushtunwali'—the way of the Pathans.

NOTES

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5. Moch. Nur Ichwan, 'Prayer in the Surinam–Javanese Diaspora Experience', available online at: < <http://isim.leidenuniv.nl/newsletter/3/regional/21.html> > (29 July 1999).
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10. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
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13. *Ibid.*
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15. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Centennial Magazine*, brochure, Queenstown Jama Masjid, Georgetown: Guyana, 1995, p. 9.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. Search of the Khans, available online at: < <http://home.nyc.rr.com/khanmain/myarticles/firstcontact.htm> > .
24. *Ibid.*
25. Mohan K. Gautam, 'The Construction of the Indian Image in Surinam: Deconstructing Colonial Derogatory Notions and Reconstructing of the Indian Identity', available online at: < <http://www.saxakali.com/indocarib/sojourner7b.htm> > .
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
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35. *Ibid.*
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Appendix 1. Translation of the Immigration Certificate

1. GIVEN NAME
2. GENDER

3. AGE
4. SKIN COLOUR
5. PHYSICAL HEIGHT
6. DISTINGUISHING FEATURES
7. NATIONALITY
8. DISTRICT OF ORIGIN
9. DISTRICT/POLICE STATION/VILLAGE
10. VILLAGE
11. PROFESSION
12. CASTE/RELIGION
13. CHILDREN
14. SHIP NAME
15. SIGN UP NUMBER
16. RECRUITMENT AGENCY
17. PLACE OF DEPARTURE
18. DATE OF DEPARTURE
19. PLACE OF ARRIVAL
20. DATE OF ARRIVAL
21. RECRUITMENT AGENCY
22. PLACE OF ARRIVAL
23. PLANTER
24. PLANTATION
25. IMMIGRATION REGISTER
26. CONTRACT STARTS
27. CONTRACT ENDS
- 28–29. RENEWAL OF CONTRACT
30. RESISTANCE ACTIVITIES
31. MEMO FIELD

Appendix 2. Sample Immigration Certificate of Pathans

Sample # 1

-
1. Jamin Shaw, Modut Khan
Relaties:* van; van; van
-

- 2-GESLACHT M
- 3-LEEFTIJD 25
- 4-HUIDSKLEUR lichtbruin
- 5-LENGTE 1.756
- 6-HERKENNINGSTEKEN geen
- 7-NATIONALITEIT Brits Indie
- 8-DISTRICT Peshawar
- 9-POLITIEPOST Moteekundan
- 10-DORP Shawajgunah
- 11-BEROEP veld of fabriekarbeid
- 12-KASTE Mahomedaan
- 13-KINDGEGEVENS N
- 14-SCHIPNAAM Engels schip 'Clive'
- 15-MONSTERNUMMER 44
- 16-WERVINGSINSTANTIE het koloniaal gouvernement
- 17-AFREISPLAATS Calcutta
- 18-AFREISDATUM 7/4/1877
- 19-AANKOMSTPLAATS Paramaribo
- 20-AANKOMSTDATUM 8/29/1877
- 21-PLANTER W.G.H.Barnet Lyon prive 299
- 22-PLANTAGE Pl.Jagtlust(Ben Sur)

23-CODENR F/156
24-BEGIN_CON 8/30/1877
25-EIND_CON 8/30/1882
26-HERBEGIN
27-HEREIND
28-REBEGIN
29-REEIND
30-KLSTATUS vertr
31-VERZET

MEMO-INFORMATIE Vertrokken naar Calcutta per Ss Kilda op 30 oct 1879. Vw.c. zie c.dd 1877 te Calcutta gesl. at contractnumber X/157.

Sample # 2

1. Gulamjan, Saith Khan
Relaties:* van; van; van

2-GESLACHT M
3-LEEFTIJD 19
4-HUIDSKLEUR
5-LENGTE 1.63
6-HERKENNINGSTEKEN pokdalig; moedervl. R borst
7-NATIONALITEIT Brits Indie
8-DISTRICT Peshaur
9-POLITIEPOST Nachera
10-DORP Nachera
11-BEROEP
12-KASTE Mosulman
13-KINDGEGEVENS N
14-SCHIPNAAM Engels schip Sutej III
15-MONSTERNUMMER 62
16-WERVINGSINSTANTIE het koloniaal gouvernement
17-AFREISPLAATS Calcutta
18-AFREISDATUM 11/27/1913
19-AANKOMSTPLAATS Paramaribo
20-AANKOMSTDATUM 1/7/1914
21-PLANTER T.Folmer Beheerder
22-PLANTAGE Pl. Jagtlust
23-CODENR Qq/98
24-BEGIN_CON 1/7/1914
25-EIND_CON 1/7/1919
26-HERBEGIN
27-HEREIND
28-REBEGIN
29-REEIND
30-KLSTATUS
31-VERZET

MEMO-INFORMATIE C.V.O. afgegeven 23-1-1919 no 43. Premie ontvangen uit i Immigr.fonds, zie akte D.C. van Ben.Com. d.d. 5/4/1919. Bij i besch. van 17-1-1921 no 71 in huur afgestaan perceel no—

Sample # 3

1. Jandaz, Mirali
Relaties:* van; van; van

2-GESLACHT M

3-LEEFTIJD 22
 4-HUIDSKLEUR
 5-LENGTE 1.67
 6-HERKENNINGSTEKEN litt.rechter scheenbeen,grijze ogen
 7-NATIONALITEIT Brits Indie
 8-DISTRICT Peshaur
 9-POLITIEPOST Peshaur
 10-DORP Peshaur
 11-BEROEP
 12-KASTE Musulman
 13-KINDGEGEVENS N
 14-SCHIPNAAM Engels schip Sutlej III
 15-MONSTERNUMMER 614
 16-WERVINGSINSTANTIE het koloniaal gouvernement
 17-AFREISPLAATS Calcutta
 18-AFREISDATUM 11/27/1913
 19-AANKOMSTPLAATS Paramaribo
 20-AANKOMSTDATUM 1/7/1914
 21-PLANTER T.Folmer Beheerder
 22-PLANTAGE Pl. Jagtlust/Rust en Werk
 23-CODENR Qq/102
 24-BEGIN_CON 1/7/1914
 25-EIND_CON 1/7/1919
 26-HERBEGIN 2/10/1919
 27-HEREIND 2/10/1924
 28-REBEGIN
 29-REEIND
 30-KLSTATUS
 31-VERZET

MEMO-INFORMATIE

Sample # 4

1. Zizan, Mazid
 Relaties:* van; van; van

2-GESLACHT V
 3-LEEFTIJD 24
 4-HUIDSKLEUR bruin
 5-LENGTE 1.45
 6-HERKENNINGSTEKEN
 7-NATIONALITEIT Brits Indie
 8-DISTRICT Barelli
 9-POLITIEPOST Bar
 10-DORP Bar
 11-BEROEP
 12-KASTE Pattan
 13-KINDGEGEVENS N
 14-SCHIPNAAM SS. Mutlah
 15-MONSTERNUMMER 409
 16-WERVINGSINSTANTIE het koloniaal gouvernement
 17-AFREISPLAATS Calcutta
 18-AFREISDATUM 5/12/1913
 19-AANKOMSTPLAATS Paramaribo
 20-AANKOMSTDATUM 6/23/1913
 21-PLANTER H.M.D.Robertson(gemachtigde v/d erven R.Kirke, beheerder van

22-PLANTAGE Pl. Hazard
 23-CODENR Pp/130
 24-BEGIN_CON 6/23/1913
 25-EIND_CON 6/23/1918
 26-HERBEGIN
 27-HEREIND
 28-REBEGIN
 29-REEIND
 30-KLSTATUS
 31-VERZET

MEMO-INFORMATIE Kind: Jhuman, j, geb. 23 oct. 1914 op pl. Hazard (Ag. 1914 No. i 2149/O). Jhuman overleden 5 nov. 1914 op pl. Hazard (Ag. 1914 No. i 2328/O). Vertrokken naar Calcutta op 5 maart 1920 per Ss Madioen.

Sample # 5

1. Rehman, Mahomed Khan
 Relaties:* van; van; van

2-GESLACHT M
 3-LEEFTIJD 24
 4-HUIDSKLEUR bruin
 5-LENGTE 1.738
 6-HERKENNINGSTEKEN litteeken op rechterwang
 7-NATIONALITEIT Brits Indie
 8-DISTRICT Hamirpore
 9-POLITIEPOST Beewa
 10-DORP Bherkharri
 11-BEROEP
 12-KASTE Musulman
 13-KINDGEGEVENS N
 14-SCHIPNAAM Engels schip 'Avon'
 15-MONSTERNUMMER 153
 16-WERVINGSINSTANTIE het koloniaal gouvernement
 17-AFREISPLAATS Calcutta
 18-AFREISDATUM 1/25/1898
 19-AANKOMSTPLAATS Paramaribo
 20-AANKOMSTDATUM 4/13/1898
 21-PLANTER J.D. Horst
 22-PLANTAGE Pl. Lust & Rust (Ben. Suriname)
 23-CODENR Aa/452
 24-BEGIN_CON 4/13/1898
 25-EIND_CON 4/13/1903
 26-HERBEGIN
 27-HEREIND
 28-REBEGIN
 29-REEIND
 30-KLSTATUS
 31-VERZET

MEMO-INFORMATIE Ontslagen 2e Kw 1903. C.V.O. op 17-6-1903 No 435. Premie ontvangen uit de Kol.kas; zie akte D.C.Ben.Para dd 31 Oct i 1903. Bij res van 22 aug 1903 No 9276 overgenomen van G.F. de Ziel de i huur van perc. No 117 van La Recontre; overgedragen aan H.A. i Tjon-A-Kiet bij res van 30 Juni 1909 No 8144. Bij besch van dd 1-12-1920 No 1697 overgenomen perceel 50 van i Livorno; ingetrokken bij besch van 6-4-1929 No 1084. Gehuwd met Joomenie d/v 697/M in Ben.Comm op 5 April 1911 (Ag'11 i No 1118/O). Rehman heeft zich op 11 jan 1956 gekozen de

gesl.naam van Rahman i en de voornaam van Moenshi Mahomedkhan en voor de kinderen, zie i reg N.V. 7-1-1956 No 8.

URL: http://www.archief.nl/suriname_english/engels/efrm_database.html?hdr_searching

IMMIGRATION CERTIFICATE OF MAZAR KHAN

URL: <http://home.nyc.rr.com/khanmain/myarticles/firstcontact.htm>

*Immigration Certificates available online at: Historic Database Suriname: Indentured Labour:
<http://www.archief.nl/suriname_english/engels/efrm_database.html?hdr_searching>.